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Subject: N&O: Atlantic Coast Pipeline faces another delay as NC officials push for more details

N&O:ATLANTIC COAST PIPELINE FACES ANOTHER DELAY AS NC OFFICIALS PUSH FOR MORE DETAILS

BY JOHN MURAWSKI

NOVEMBER 29, 2017 04:39 PM

The planned Atlantic Coast Pipeline, already more than a year behind schedule, could face further delays as North Carolina officials once again seek additional information on the project's potential impacts to the communities the pipeline will traverse.

The N.C. Department of Environmental Quality on Wednesday sent the pipeline's developers a fourth round of

questions about the economic benefits and environmental risks of the project. The unusual repeat request gives pipeline officials 30 days to respond and gives the agency 60 days to review their response.

The energy consortium building the pipeline includes Charlotte-based Duke Energy and Dominion Energy in Richmond, Va. The proposed 600-mile pipeline would cross West Virginia, Virginia and North Carolina to bring natural gas from northern fracking operations to fuel Duke's power plants in North Carolina and South Carolina.

Duke said the Atlantic Coast Pipeline will submit a responses in less than 30 days.

"We're working on a response to the NC DEQ's data request and will submit it in short order," Duke said in a statement. "We don't expect an impact to the overall project schedule."

Department of Environmental Quality spokeswoman Bridget Munger said the answers could spark further inquiries.

"It really will depend on whether they provide the information requested, and once staff has reviewed it, what additional questions they will have," Munger said of the timeline.

In North Carolina, the project requires an air quality permit to operate a compressor station in Northampton County that will help push the gas through the pipeline. The air quality permit is expected to be issued Dec. 15.

It also requires a water quality permit to allow the underground pipeline to cross several hundred streams, creeks and other bodies of water. This permit hinges on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline's responses to the fourth set of questions. The agency is asking for information previously requested but not adequately answered by the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

The Department of Environmental Quality is looking for details on economic benefits to specific areas along the pipeline's route, as opposed to generalizations about economic benefits. The agency wants a forecast of future economic conditions with the pipeline and without the pipeline, along with an analysis of the two forecasts, and an explanation of the logic on which the analysis is based.

Munger said the questions focus on economic impacts because the agency is looking at the "cumulative impacts" of the project. Previous questions sought information on the pipeline's environmental consequences.

The agency also wants additional information on the pipeline's end point, which was originally proposed in Robeson County. Atlantic Coast Pipeline officials later suggested that the pipeline would be extended to South Carolina at some point.

The pipeline review has generated about 15,000 public comments to the Department of Environmental Quality. Additionally, nearly 5,000 public comments missed the agency's deadline, arriving after the public comment period closed, Munger said.

The Atlantic Coast Pipeline would bring natural gas from the Marcellus and Utica shale formations in Pennsylvania and West Virginia to supply Duke's natural-gas-fired power plants. The project has received approval from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and is awaiting state permits. More than 40 organizations have appealed the federal permit, saying the project is not necessary and poses environmental risks.